

“Trust”

In 1974 a quirky book was published that had previously been rejected for publication 121 times. Despite all of this rejection when it was finally published the book initially sold over five million copies. This is one of the few books that I can say changed my life. It actually changed how I live. If it taught me only one thing it was to not allow the enormity of a task stop me dead in my tracks. If I could break down a large task into steps and focus on only completing that step, I had a better chance of completing what at first glance might seem impossible.

I had no expectations when I started reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.¹ I knew it was a bestseller but I knew nothing about Zen and other than changing the oil in my car I had never ventured into maintaining a vehicle of any kind much less a motorcycle. His words grabbed me when he wrote that his book “should in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice. It’s not very factual on motorcycles, either.” There was a lot that I did not understand in the book, especially the philosophical references, but the road trip story was captivating, and when Pirsig wrote about how he learned to work on his motorcycle something clicked. I had often found myself stymied by something new and outside of my ken. The way he approached his motorcycle helped me to learn how to approach new and seemingly overwhelming tasks and agendas.

One of the basic tenants of his Zen-like approach to life and motorbikes is trust; trust in yourself and trust in something beyond yourself. Similarly, the scripture readings today are about trust. Trust in God is at the heart of the Genesis story, the psalm, Philippians and the gospel.

In the Genesis story we have the ongoing narrative of Abram² to whom God has promised descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the desert. The problem is that Abram is very old and his wife is well past childbearing years. Yet Abram has continued to follow YHWH’s (יהוה) instructions going wherever God sends him. Abram has trusted God, but the extraordinary promise of children so late in life seems impossible. Thus YHWH reassures Abram through this mysterious ritual of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. The ritual is like God signing a contract that says even the impossible is possible with God.

Psalms 27 is a poem of trust in God. At its end there is reassurance that God is faithful. The poet writes. “O tarry and await the Lord’s pleasure; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart; wait patiently for the Lord.”

Paul’s Letter to the Philippians deals with a congregation distracted by those who live a decadent life that ignores God, but do not seem to suffer. Paul assures them that living with disregard for God in this life means a life away from God now and in the life to come. While food and drink and may be satisfying now “their glory is in their

¹ Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, [New York, Bantam ©1974]

² God will rename him Abraham in Genesis 17:5 Abram means “high father” and Abraham “father of many.” God also renames Sarai (my princess) to Sarah meaning mother of nations.

shame.”³ Rather those who “are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” will “be conformed to the body of his glory.”⁴

Finally we come to the gospel where some Pharisees, men of a sect that seems to always be questioning Jesus, warn him that Herod Antipas⁵ wants to kill him. Jesus seems to be fearless calling Herod “a fox”. While a fox is cunning they are also the ones who hide in underground dens. Jesus will not hide out despite the Pharisees’ warning. Jesus will continue on his journey to Jerusalem no matter what Herod or the Pharisees say for he has put his trust in God. Indeed, knowing what the destination will bring, Jesus would not have set out on this journey if he did not trust in God.

Furthermore, Jesus lays out his agenda for heading to Jerusalem when he states, he is “casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work;” the last part is an allusion to the day of his rising from the tomb. He also points to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he says, “you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Jesus trusts God the Father even to death on a cross.

In this season of Lent, we are asked to renew our trust in God. As Jesus says “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”⁶

We are called by Jesus, in fact the entire biblical tradition, Old and New Testament, to trust in God, to have faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. When we trust in God, as Abram did, as the psalmist did, as Paul did and as Jesus does that is where we will find strength, truth, and joy. As the hymn states, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.”⁷

Seek the Lord. Rebuild and strengthen your trust in God this Lent. God was our help in ages past and God is our only hope in years to come. All else will fail us, only God is true. As St. Paul wrote, “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love... stand firm in the Lord.”⁸

³ Philippians 3:19

⁴ Philippians 3:30-31

⁵ This is Herod Antipas son of Herod the Great who was tetrarch over Galilee under the Romans.

⁶ Matthew 6:19-21 NRSV

⁷ Karen Lafferty, “Seek Ye First”

⁸ Philippians 4:1 NRSV